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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study was made of the daily experiences of young children and their teachers in a nonprofit day care center. The study's major focus concerned the orientations of four day care teachers toward children's individual and social learning experiences. Key concerns of the study were values, classroom interaction, and social continuity. By viewing children's day-by-day experiences and their teachers' orientations toward individual and social experiences, the investigation provided a conceptual model for understanding whether day care does in fact threaten the continuity of America's values. The research approach primarily followed the interpretive tradition; aspects of the positivist and critical social science perspectives were included. Four dimensions of teacher behavior were found to be salient in the data: teachers' arrangement of environment; their interactions with children; their interactions with each other; and children's action that the teacher allowed and/or encouraged. Analysis of each of these dimensions provided evidence that teachers' actions predominantly emphasized individual learning, even within different social situations. This finding was examined from an historical perspective. It was concluded that teachers' emphasis on children's individual learning experiences perpetuates America's tradition of individualism. (Contrasts among the basic assumptions of positivist, interpretive, and critical research orientations are illustrated in chart form.) (RH)

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Meaning and Purposes of Recurrent Interactive Processes in Supplementary Child Rearing

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MEANING AND PURPOSES OF RECURRENT INTERACTIVE PROCESSES
IN SUPPLEMENTARY CHILD REARING

I. DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Recently I completed a field study of the daily experiences of young children and their teachers in a non-profit day care center, Rosehill. The major focus of the study is on the orientations of four day care teachers toward children's individual learning experiences and children's social learning experiences. The key concerns of the study are values, classroom interaction, and social continuity.

Day care critics argue that social childrearing within day care weakens the family and leads to collectivist rather than individualistic values, and thereby threatens the social continuity of America's values. This field study focuses on individual and social value orientations. Through six months of participant observation, I have examined four day care teachers interactions as they emphasize children's individual and social learning experiences. By viewing children's day by day experiences and their teachers' orientation toward individual and social experiences, this field study provides a conceptual model for an initial understanding of whether day care does in fact, threaten the continuity of America's values.

II THEORETICAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

This morning I shall attempt to locate this field study as one instance of a larger stream of social science research and theory. The use of participant observation is not a theoretical position in and of itself and can be implemented from varying theoretical orientations - positivist (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Homans, 1950), interpretive (e.g. Geerts, 1973; Jackson, 1978), or critical (Berlak and Berlak, 1981; Willis, 1977). My research approach primarily follows the interpretive tradition; however, I have attempted to integrate aspects of the positivist and critical social science perspective. Initially,

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before gathering data for this study, I had been challenged by the work of Berlak and Berlak(1981), Faye(1975), Mills(1959) and Young(1971) to move beyond the basic tenets of the positivist and interpretive traditions with which I was familiar, and to connect my planned field study to broader structural arrangements of society. In the actual implementation of the field study, I followed Bernstein's (1976) claim that "empirical research, interpretation, and critical evaluation dialectically involve each other ...An adequate, comprehensive political and social theory must be at once empirical, interpretive, and critical." (p. xiv) Figure 1 presents an overview of my understanding of the basic assumptions within these 3 intellectual traditions.

-insert Figure 1 here-

The positions portrayed in this figure reflect my attempt to synthesize readings of both researchers and theorists in each tradition and those scholars who have analyzed these 3 major domains of research (e.g. Bernstein, 1976; Bredo and Feinberg, 1982; Faye, 1975; Karabel and Halsey, 1977).

2.1 The Positivist Perspective

Some aspects of my field study take its direction from the positivist tradition of case study research, such as the work of Homans(1950) and Glaser and Strauss(1967). Four features of this study emerge from the positivist tradition. First, I accept their argument that the underpinning of all concepts is the concrete description of observed events. All generalizations regarding the four teachers are "grounded" in the daily events at Rosehill. Second, in data collection, I attempted to record ongoing events as objectively as possible, and to separate interpretive comments from behavioral observations. Admittedly the decision of what to observe is somewhat subjective, but I tried to keep the actual recording as true to the events as was possible for one person to implement. Third, from this tradition of field research, I have utilized specific indices initially to guide but also to insure credibility of my research process. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) discussion of "theoretical sampling" was a significant guide in my generating

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POSITIVIST	INTERPRETIVE	CRITICAL
..maintains a dualistic view of mind & body, subject & object	..maintains the unity of thinking & experience, subject & object	..maintains the unity of thinking & experience, subject & object
..assumes that objective reality is known independent of self	..assumes that reality & the self interpenetrate	..assumes that reality & the self interpenetrate
..separates past, present, & future	..assumes the unity of past, present & future	..assumes the unity past, present & future
..seeks objective, impersonal, exclusive knowledge - "How do I know what I know?"	..seeks intersubjective, interpersonal, inclusive knowledge - "How do I know what I do?"	..seeks intersubjective, interpersonal, inclusive knowledge - "How should I do?"
..uses a preordained research design that is reductionistic & deductive	..uses a research design that is emergent & the process is inductive	..uses a research design that is emergent & the process is dialectic
..aims to verify hypotheses for the purpose of prediction & control	..aim is to capture the process as it naturally occurs	..aim is to raise consciousness of actors to empower them for self emancipation
..strives to screen out all confounding variables in the research process	..remains open to all factors within the given context	..remains open to all factors within the given context & searches for historical & structural connections
..maintains a clear distinction between subjects & researcher	..attempts to capture the subjects' meaning & intentionality via an intersubjective process	..actively involves subjects in all aspects of the research process

Figure 1

Basic Assumptions Within the Research Process
Emerging from Three Intellectual Traditions

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POSITIVIST	INTERPRETIVE	CRITICAL
..conducts research that is context stripping	..focuses research on situational contextual issues embedded in actions & meanings of those being observed	..searches beyond the situational to uncover broader social/ structural elements embedded within the situational events
..studies only overt aspects of behavior	..studies covert as well as overt aspects of behavior	..studies covert as well as overt aspects of behavior
..seeks explanations giving probability of proof via mathematical/ statistical procedures	..seeks explanations concerned with understanding meaning & purposes of actions embedded within specific situations	..seeks explanations concerned with understanding meaning & purposes of actions as they relate to historical & social structural elements of larger society
..claims that theory & research are value free	..claims that theory & research are embedded with values which need to be uncovered & examined	..claims that "ought" question & the value of self empowerment & accompanying emancipation is central to the research process
..separates theory & practice	..separates theory & practice	..unifies theory & practice
..is concerned with validity that is measurement oriented	..is concerned with validity based on internal consistency, experiential consensus & theoretical coherence	..views validity as tied to the subject's self empowerment & emancipation

Figure 1 Continued

Basic Assumptions Within the Research Process
Emerging from Three Intellectual Traditions

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themes, and in my judging the adequacy of my data gathering process. Bruyn's (1966) discussion of "subjective adequacy" and Becker's (1970) discussion of "field work evidence" was integrated into Smith's (1979) discussion of major conditions that assure valid data in field research. Fourth, this qualitative study does utilize some quatitative indices to communicate both research process and findings. For example, in judging credibility of method the amount of days in the field, of variety of situations observed, of methods used in data collection were significant criteria. Comparative analysis of the proportion of one type of event versus another also assisted in analyzing my findings. Obviously my use of quantitative data is markedly different from the mathematical and statisticaly methods of verification research. But my point is that mere use of qualitative case study methods does not negate the value of quantitative indices.

2.2 The Interpretive Perspective

Following the interpretive tradition, a central mode of this inquiry is the intent to capture the meaning of events from the perspective of the actors, that is, the teachers. Hence recurrently I asked teachers "What do you make of this? -What do you see as the meaning/purpose of that?" I attempted to keep teachers' interpretation of meaning close to the observational data.

Faye(1975) sees this understanding of actors from their own perspective to be the first step in both interpretive and critical inquiry. Historically this process has been called verstehen. A basic assumption underlying this type of explanation is that intentionality is contained within the person's action. Understanding focuses on covert as well as overt aspects of a person's action and thus, the dualistic separation of behavior and intentionality common in the positivist tradition is rejected. In his now classic essay on "The Operation called Verstehen", Abel (1948) distinguishes this verstehen explanation that uncovers possible understanding with the positivists' focus on verification and

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and prediction. In other words, explanation following the interpretive approach does not provide certainty; rather it provides an understanding that can be considered adequate if the reader considers it possible.

Locating this approach in a broader stream of knowledge and philosophy, this study's interpretive process takes its direction from the nineteenth century historian and mentor of George Herbert Mead - William Dilthey. Dilthey (1961) claims that the use of understanding provides the social sciences with a method distinct from those of the physical sciences. Pivotal to Dilthey's argument is the concept of meaning. Dilthey differentiates meaningful relations from causal relations. He claims that we understand meaning through expression, the shared language of people. We recognize expressions or signs from our own experience; that is, we understand conventional signs from having learned conventional, accepted ways of doing things. This linking of experience, expression and understanding Dilthey terms the hermeneutic process, that is interpretation of meaning through - intersubjective understanding.

In my study I tried to describe teachers' actions and to present an understanding of their aims and cognitions within the specific characteristics of Rosehill Child Care Center. As I analyzed my data, I searched for themes and connections among the many observed events. From my observational data, I uncovered four dimensions of these teacher's schooling involved in their emphasis of individual and social learning experiences: their arrangement of environment, their interactions with the children and with each other, and the children's action allowed and/or encouraged. Analyzing each of these dimensions gives evidence that Rosehill teachers' actions predominantly lean toward an individual learning emphasis, even within many social situations.

An understanding of the meaning and purpose of these teachers' schooling action emerged from extended observations, from the teachers' explanations, from teachers' personal histories, and from my personal and professional history as

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it intersects with the above. Eight reasons are presented as tentative possible means of understanding events at Rosehill: 1) teachers' educational assumptions, 2) teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skill, 3) teachers' personal history, 4) teachers' management needs, 5) teachers' maintenance needs, 6) teachers' personal needs, 7) the given environment at Rosehill, and 8) the children's action. If valid, these understandings will have meaning to the reader of this vield study via a new hermeneutic process, that is, the interpretation of meaning through the reader's intersubjective understanding.

2.3 Toward a Critical Approach

Two criticisms that critical theorists and the 'new' sociologists of education have directed toward interpretive field studies are their failure to relate observed action and meaning of the specific context under study to structural elements of the social order, and their neglect of addressing issues of historical change (Faye, 1975; Habermas, 1971; Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Mills, 1959; Young, 1971). I have attempted to incorporate these strands of critical social science into this field study's central interpretive approach.

Mills(1959) claims that every social study requires history in order to discover the historical development and the historical specificity of social practices, or what Dilthey(1961) speaks of as "...unearthing the temporal structures of life for the understanding of meaning." (p. 30). In uncovering the historical specificity of social practices, the researcher discovers relationships of elements of a social structure and meaningfulness is to be found in these relationships. Further, it is the historical perspective which provides variety and discovery of alternatives to the present.

This discovery of relationships, alternatives and comparisons through historical analysis is one aspect of critical social science used to provide the context for this field study of day care. Through examining day care and the family from an historical perspective, we can see how the nature of both social

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institutions is interconnected with each other and with the economy and polity. This examination gives us further insight into how family structure and functioning have changed, and with these changes, how conceptions of childhood as a separate developmental realm, and the role of women as guardian of the home and caretaker of young children have evolved. Understanding our society's idealization of maternal childrearing helps to understand America's ambivalence toward day care, our absence of a unified social policy toward quality day care, as well as the dearth of credible research on day care.

Another key component of Mills' perspective on social research is the understanding of biographies of individuals, especially as personal biography intersects with history and social institutions. Mills use of personal biography and history implies a specific view of temporality -- that the present, future and past always intersect in the act; that is, the present is in constant flux, continuous with past and future. This view of temporality is fully articulated by Mead (1964) who notes: "Each person slices the world from a different time system" (p. 341). Embracing this view of temporality assumes that to understand the present one must have an historical perspective. In understanding ongoing events at Rosehill, I attempted to learn how each teacher's personal biography intersected with observed action. Following the interpretive approach, I engaged in frequent informal interviews and more structured taped interviews, in which teachers spoke of their personal histories and of their views of the meaning of observed events. Given the constraints of both time and availability of just one researcher, these personal histories are somewhat thin; nevertheless they do provide, on critical incidents a significant lens in understanding the meaningfulness of particular teacher actions.

Critical theory and the 'new' sociology of education argue that the meaning of classroom events needs to be penetrated beyond the objective happenings to

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uncover assumptions underlying these happenings. In order to connect the findings from this field study to arrangements within the broader society, America's dominant value tradition of individualism is examined from an historical perspective in order to ask whether the day care children's individual and social experiences in this study are congruent with our society's value orientation.

Findings from this participant observation study indicate how within a social context, Rosehill teachers' emphasis on children's individual learning experiences perpetuates this value tradition. For example, the preponderance of individually focused activity choices, in which children "do what they want in their own way", reinforces an orientation toward independent functioning. Individual achievement and self improvement are emphasized as teachers focus on assisting children in master of self care habits and success in individual task completion.

In his critique of social science research based on the philosophy of natural science, Mills (1959) argues:

> Social research of any kind is advanced by ideas; it is only disciplined by fact. (p.71)

A central thesis of this field study is that the interpretive approach is of heuristic value in that it has the potential to raise significant issues that professionals concerned with quality day care need to address, and the potential to generate hypotheses and theory in the Glaser and Strauss (1967) sense. In orther words, this study's significance can be seen in terms of contributing lenses for professionals to think about early childhood education, and day care in particular, in ways they have not considered previously.

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